RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

LEAFLETS
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MAHONIA NEVINII
NEVIN'S MAHONIA

Prepared
by
RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
of the
NATIVE PLANTS OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Ana Canyon
Orange County
California

No. 35 June 14, 1940

MAHONIA NEVINII
NEVIN'S MAHONIA

Berberidaceae Barberry Family

Evergreen shrub with yellow wood, reaching a height of 6-10 ft., much-branched from the base and usually forming a rounded mass broader than high. Leaves pale green (with a gray cast), the young ones reddish, alternate, but often congested and somewhat fascicled on short branchlets; leaflets 3-5 (rarely 7), lanceolate, the lateral about $\frac{3}{4}$ in. long, the terminal 1-1$\frac{1}{2}$ in. long, all spinulose margined, the teeth weak or bristlelike. Flowers about $\frac{1}{4}$ in. across, yellow, borne in small racemes terminating the short branchlets; pedicels $\frac{1}{4}$-$\frac{1}{3}$ in. long; sepals 6, petaloid, in 2 series, the outer or lower much smaller and subtended by 2 lanceolate, greenish bracts; petals 6, broadly ovate or oval, bifid at apex; stamens 6, the filaments rather thick, the anthers opening by valves. Normally the stamens stand back against the petals but when stimulated quickly close around the ovary - a characteristic of the genus and one of the California plants in which movement of parts can be seen as the result of mechanical stimulation. Ovary superior, 1-celled, the stigma sessile, peltate cap. Fruits slightly longer than broad, orange-reddish, more or less translucent, sour, usually containing 2 seeds with shiny brown surfaces. Cotyledons appear above the ground in germination, are broadly ovate, nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ in. long; The first leaves have but a single ovate leaflet.

The genus Mahonia (after Bernard McMahon, an American horticulturist; 1775-1816) consists of over 50 species in North America and in eastern and southern Asia. Some botanists consider that Mahonia is but a part of the much larger genus Berberis, but there are several fundamental differences of which the spineless stems and compound leaves of Mahonia are the most conspicuous. The generic name Odostemon was proposed by Rafinesque a few months earlier than Mahonia (1818), but was rejected in the 1910 International Rules in favor of Mahonia.

Mahonia Nevinii was first discovered in 1882 by Rev. Nevin, a Los Angeles minister. His specimens, which were obtained "near Los Angeles" in the San Fernando Valley near the town of San Fernando, were forwarded to Dr. Asa Gray, of Harvard University, who described the plant as new in 1895, under the genus Berberis, honoring its discoverer in the selection of the specific name. In 1901, Fedde transferred the species to Mahonia, a disposition which has been accepted by a large number of botanists.

Mahonia Nevinii is one of the rarest of all California shrubs. Only about 100 plants are known in the wild, scattered over a mile or two of the gravel washes southeast of San Fernando. All of these plants which we have been able to locate appear to be well over 10 years old and since seed crops are rarely set, the species seems destined to disappear entirely in its native habitat, this rate of extinction being hastened by tin can dumps, brush fires, pasturing of goats and the building of residences throughout the area.

Theodore Payne, California Native Plant nurseryman, should be credited with introducing Nevin's Mahonia to horticulture. He first grew it more than 20 years ago and it has thus found its way into plantings in many parts of California.

Nevin's Mahonia is a versatile plant, for despite its value for dry gardens and for sandy and rocky situations, it readily adapts itself to nearly any type of soil, even to heavy adobe, and appears to enjoy copious amounts of water. Planted in masses it is very effective, while single specimens will attain a height of over 10 ft. and spread of about 15 ft. In partial shade against a wall it makes an interesting tall shrub. Border plantings or untrimmed hedges are also ideal uses for this species. From March to April the clusters of small yellow flowers cover the plants, giving a pleasing display against the background of pale gray-green mature leaves and reddish new ones. From May until July the small reddish-orange fruits are usually abundant, but are soon eaten by various birds.

Propagation of Mahonia Nevinii offers no great difficulties, although we were unable to obtain seed in the wild until 1932 (the fourth attempt and then only one plant had fertile seeds). The fruits which mature in late June should have the pulp removed from the seeds. These should be planted in outside beds or boxes in the fall but may not germinate until spring. When the seedlings are about an inch high they should be transplanted to containers, preferably to cans, since small pots cause coiled roots. The seedlings should be from 6 to 12 inches high the first fall and should then be set out. Early pinching off of the terminal shoots will result in well branched plants. Mature plants should be trimmed by thinning the oldest and largest shoots, the cuts being made as near the ground as possible.

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

Of The Native Plants of California.

Established 1927

In Memory of John W. Bixby

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Purpose: A scientific institution devoted to the growth and study of the native plants of California for their botanical, horticultural and popular features.

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